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ABSTRACT

Installation of a success-based model of learning (that is, a mastery-learning-based system) will help superintendents make education effective and efficient. Such a system follows a number of concepts, including favorable learning conditions, teachers qualified in learning-centered practices, clear learning objectives, and alternative learning strategies for students, but it is especially based on continuous, computer-generated diagnostic and prescriptive data for tracking individual pupil progress. Installing such a system means finding out what administrators, teachers, and learners need to know and do to ensure learner success, and finding out what must be done to maintain effectiveness. Among the political requirements for such a system is school board commitment to learner success and to the learning-centered performance system. Technical requirements include teacher commitment to such a system and awareness of the difference between learner-and teacher-centered learning. In managing a mastery-learning-centered system, necessary data will be supplied to teachers (for diagnosis and prescription), principals (for support activities), central office administrators, and the superintendent and the board (for revisions and new objectives and resources). (RW)

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INSTALLING A DISTRICT-WIDE LEARNING-CENTERED PERFORMANCE SYSTEM: MEETING SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS

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INSTALLING A DISTRICT-WIDE LEARNING-CENTERED PERFORMANCE SYSTEM: MEETING SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESS

Gene Geisert

A revolution is taking place in public education. Propelled by technological advances, thoughtful administrators are looking to a breakthrough in professional practices and methods to provide answers as to how to better assure that students will learn successfully. The future is already here in a few lighthouse districts and will quickly spread through the nation's schools.

The concepts of results-focused learning are spreading simply because it delivers a more effective, efficient strategy for delivering success for the learner. Students are mastering the basic skills in various environments at every grade level when results-focused learning is implemented. Such a system is designed to deliver effective and predictable learning results.

As with the application of any new approach, however, the widespread use of results-focused learning will require dynamic leadership if we are to seize upon this opportunity and create a climate for success.

Public educators are undeniably under attack. So pervasive is the perception that American public schools are failing that non-educator groups are seeking to replace the traditional role of the superintendent by substituting a new cadre of instructional decision-makers. Many school boards no longer look for or desire their chief executive officer to be an innovator of "best educational practices."

State legislators frequently cite a crisis in public education as a rational for passing mandated instructional approaches or for supporting alternative educational structures. Community groups, mayors, city councils, and the courts are all actively seeking to influence the future direction of American education. And the environment is particularly hostile to the superintendency. There is a frightening similarity between modern innovative superintendencies and the giant turtles of the Galapagos Islands - in a striking documentary Jacques Cousteau vividly portrayed the dangers fledging turtles faced from land, sea and air predators.

Hostile climate notwithstanding, it is my thesis that ultimately only the superintendent, with the potential power base for monitoring and initiating system change which that role carries, is in a position to bring about comprehensive change resolving stated crisis. Aggressive, skilled, local administrators hold the key to creating schools that work effectively. Local superintendents have new tools which will enable them to recapture the rapidly deteriorating leadership role. Their heritage as school officers provides a strong foundation for the winning approach. Superintendents have sought what is best for learners. Rarely have they sought personal gain or political payoffs, or carried hidden agendas. They are "up front" for learners. Successful learners form the platform for building the ultimate rationale for the continued existence of a strong public school system. Success-based learning will be a powerful piece in helping superintendents to survive the future (if not public education itself).

In essence, success models for learners follow these concepts:

1. Youngsters are provided favorable learning conditions, and are given sufficient time to achieve.
2. Professional educators are qualified to apply new learning-centered practices assuring the delivery of successful learning outcomes and the effective management of the delivery of learning results, i.e., performance objectives and standards.
3. Students are given clearly stated learning objectives that specify skills to be learned and that spell out standards of performance; and they are given required learning ladders (learning paths) to assure progress to success in achieving mastery learning objectives and standards.
4. Learners are offered alternative learning strategies to assure successful progression to the achievement of objectives and standards.
5. There is progressive computer managed assessment and analysis of student results by the teacher to chart each student's progress and to assist the teacher in selecting viable alternative learning strategies.
6. The teacher applies a continuous diagnostic, prescriptive, confirmation, and revision process at each step of the learning path to control the quality of learning results delivered.
7. Teachers are provided with computer supplied performance

data to track pupil progress on an individual basis, and to provide need-to-know information so that appropriate decisions can be made by learning managers to assure progressive success by learners.

Providing the teacher with continuous micro computer generated diagnostic, prescriptive data that free the teacher to teach, based on prepared learning blueprints for delivering successful learning, is the most exciting and challenging cornerstone of all.

In turn, utilizing a system-wide learning management system, teachers will have at their fingertips precise data which will not only assist them in managing classroom activities, but, further, will provide for the selection of appropriate instructional media to supplement teaching strategies for delivering predictable learning success.

Imagine knowing where each pupil is in terms of his or her learning needs, having multiple learning approaches inventoried for prescription by the teacher, and, having the pupil's progress monitored at every step of school life leading to his or her predictable success.

Think of a learning-centered management system that further groups children by need and by capability and by learning style; and offers methods by which the group can be taught or reinforced in the achievement of those skills the teacher is presenting with resulting predictable success for learners.

To survive the future, public education must show significant and timely improvement toward meeting the demand that schools be, first, EFFECTIVE in delivering predictable learner success and, second,

EFFICIENT in the management and in the use of limited resources when delivering successful learning results.

Sharing real-world experiences and requirements for installing a successful learning-centered delivery system in the schools

In retrospect, my five years (1975-1980) directing the New Orleans SCIP Program has taught me valuable lessons which can have an impact on the success of other mastery-learning system installations. These lessons refer to both POLITICAL and TECHNICAL requirements.

Rethinking for the design and installation of a district-wide Learning-Centered Performance System

It must be initially understood that the successful installation of a district-wide learning delivery system will require major changes by all educational partners in ways of thinking about, planning for, designing for, and managing the delivery of predictable learner success.

Following is a series of critical questions which must be asked and answered, in the sequence presented in order to install a successful district-wide Learning-Centered Performance System.

Question 1 asks: What must administrators know and do in order to do for teachers and learners?

Question 2 asks: What must teachers know/do to insure student success?

Question 3 asks: What must learners know/do to be successful in schools and life? (K-12)

Question 4 asks: What must be done (added/deleted/revised) to maintain learning system effectiveness?

The answers to these significant questions are presented in Table I (Appendix A).

Political and Technical Requirements for Installing a District-Wide Learning-Centered Performance System

In order to achieve success for learners, the school board must understand the concept of learning-centered practices to be installed in a school district and must commit itself to these professional practice requirements.

- o The school board must be committed to learner success as the prime business of the schools.
- o The school board must make a multi-year (long-range) commitment to the installation of a district-wide Learning-Centered Performance system; i.e., every partner committed to the success of each learner as the first order of business.
- o The school board must see this commitment as its top priority and see dollars as a MUST-DO investment requirement.
- o The school board must commit sufficient resources to accomplish these requirements.
- o The school board must establish realistic time requirements to install an effective and successful learning delivery system.

The installation of a district-wide learning delivery system also requires that the concepts of outcome-based learning be differentiated from traditional schooling processes. Professionals must be committed to new Learning Centered competencies based on new instruction/learning requirements. Predictable learning does not simply mean achieving

priority learning objectives and criterion measures. This commitment has major implications for change, including (A) advancement of students based only on each learner's achievement of measurable performance (standards), and (B) reporting to parents on the achievement of learning objectives.

The most crucial, technical requirement for installing a district-wide learning system is that every teacher, teacher-aide, and/or those responsible for delivering predictable learning results be committed to and qualified in learner-centered professional competencies as follows:

A. Each teacher understands the difference between a TEACHING-CENTERED instructional learning process, and a LEARNING-CENTERED instructional process; and, that each teacher commits himself or herself to the use of the new professional practices required for the delivery of predictable learner success.

B. Each professional teacher teaches with learning blueprints "DESIGNED THROUGH THE EYES OF THE LEARNER" - not through the eyes of the teacher.

C. Each teacher agrees to his or her accountability for the daily application of learning-centered practices in his or her classroom; and, each professional will agree to be evaluated on his/her performance in delivering outcomes for learners.

Managing for the Delivery of District-Wide Predictable Learner Results

Given the achievement of the above stated requirements, the Learning-Centered management system can be effectively designed and

installed. The larger the school district, the greater the complexity in operation, management, and quality control requirements. One will see the increasing requirement for quality control procedures in order to provide timely and necessary data for teachers, principals, and senior school administrators in order to deliver precise learning successes in a school district. The quality control checks allow managers to evaluate performance results against prestated standards at a specific time; to identify deviation from expected achievement of preplanned outcomes; and, where necessary to remediate for performance discrepancies in learning and/or management outcomes. This latter process (quality control) is defined as control of the quality of the results-to-be achieved-not of the professionals involved.

A computerized mastery learning-centered management system responds to the needs of each manager for results as follows:

- For the classroom teacher as the accountable manager for delivery of learning success: Management data provide him or her a diagnostic, prescriptive data base for making appropriate instructional/learning decisions; and, selections from among alternative strategies and means in order to coordinate delivery of predictable mastery learner results.
- For the principal as the accountable manager for supporting the successful delivery of successful learners in each classroom: Data are provided for decisions as to those need-to-know and/or do support actions to be performed to maintain

quality assurance of learning results in each classroom.

- For the central office administrator as the accountable manager for major programs, the overall school's performance, and all district level goals and objectives: All required performance data are provided in the correct form, at the required time and frequency as related to required decisions specific to the major focus of the district, i.e., successful learners.
- For the superintendent and the school board as the ultimate accountable managers for district-wide results to be reported to the community-at-large: The data base is provided for annual revisions, for new objectives, and for new resource requirements. (Educational Performance Audit - EPA).

Each of the levels of management and operation defined above has its unique need-to-know (data) and need-to-do (action) requirements in order to make appropriate decisions specific to (a) defining priority targets for action; (b) committing itself to the achievement of priority results as expressed by performance objectives and criteria and (c) monitoring performance effectiveness "along-the-way" and "at-the end" of implementation programs.

Given the ongoing management/decision-making requirements stated above, the installation of a computerized learning-centered management system becomes most rational in order to deliver the desired and most cost-effective results for learners, teachers, principals, senior

administrators, board members, and the community. Hopefully, some superintendents will, like the turtles of Galapagos, stick their necks out and take a first step toward a brave new world where "The voice of the turtle(s) will be heard throughout the land." (The Bible, Song of Solomon, Capter 2, Verse 10-12.)

TABLE 1: Questions to be Asked and Answered to Design and Install a District-Wide Learning-Centered Performance System

APPENDIX I

Question 1	Question 2		Question 3	Question 4
What must administrators know and do in order to do for teachers and learners?	What must teachers know/ do to insure student success?		What must learners know/do to be successful in schools & life? (K-12)	What must be done (added/deleted/ revised) to maintain learning system effectiveness?
Acquire specialized skills in: - planning - management - evaluation for results to install, support and manage a Learning-Centered delivery system assuring predictable learning success. Prepare and Learn: to monitor, control and revise system to deliver predictable results for learners. Install and operate a computerized learning-centered management system to assure efficient operation.	Acquire: Professional practices for delivering predictable learning success - Knowledge of content in subject matter area Acquire: Skills required as a teacher to deliver success for learners Acquire: Management skills: diagnostic/prescriptive/confirmation/revision steps to control the delivery of predictable learning success	Apply Learning-Centered skills to develop predictable mastery learning outcomes (Learning Paths designed to assure learner success). Implement professional practices to design program success for learners. (Closed-Loop Learning-Centered steps: - Diagnosis - Prescription - Confirmation - Revision	Achieve learning outcomes specified in the K-12 Learning Paths designed "through the eyes of the learner" to produce mastery of progressive learning objectives and criteria Achieve Graduation Objectives and Standards for exit from schools designed to: - Get and hold a job - Generate at least sufficient resources to be self-sufficient - Generate quality life outcomes.	Identify change requirements specific to: - new priority needs - new professional competencies to be learned - more effective management/ organization - more effective: management decision-making evaluation procedures Initiate actions to revise as required to increase overall learning system effectiveness and efficiencies